Office of River Protection

PRESS RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT:
Erik Olds (DOE), 509/372-8656
Geoff Tyree (CH2M HILL), 509/372-1145

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
June 18, 2003

LIQUID WASTE MOVED TO STABILIZE HANFORD FACILITY

With the removal of thousands of gallons of radioactive and hazardous waste, the U.S. Department of Energy Office of River Protection (ORP) and CH2M HILL Hanford Group are one step closer to stabilizing a facility that was once used to transfer waste between nuclear materials processing buildings and large underground waste tanks at the Hanford Site in southeast Washington State.

CH2M HILL crews pumped approximately 18,000 gallons of radioactive and hazardous waste from the facility, known as the 244-AR Vault, into Hanford's double-shell tank system last week. Transferring the liquid waste out of the vault is important to reducing the risk the facility currently poses to the environment.

"Removing the liquid waste from this aging facility is important to reducing the risk that waste could potentially leak into the soil," said John Swailes, Assistant Manager for Tank Farms for ORP. "Pumping out the liquid waste also sets the stage for interim stabilization of the vault, a Tri-Party Agreement milestone to be completed by September 30, 2003."

Constructed between 1966 and 1968, the 100 foot-long, concrete-walled 244-AR Vault was used until the early 1990s to ensure safe waste transfers between Hanford facilities that processed irradiated nuclear fuel, specifically the Plutonium Uranium Extraction Plant and B Plant, and the Hanford tanks. Sodium hydroxide was added in the 244-AR facility to make the waste from the processing plants less acidic, so the waste wouldn't corrode the steel walls of Hanford tanks.

Years of past processing history and water intrusions into the facility left 19,000 gallons of liquid in four different tanks in the facility and in a secondary containment system. The 244-AR cleanup project focused initially on consolidating that waste into one of the facility's tanks. Sampling was done to verify compatibility with Hanford's double-shell tanks prior to transferring the 244-AR waste to Hanford's underground storage tanks last week.

MORE

Work to complete interim stabilization of the facility will include plugging transfer lines and drains to prevent runoff water from entering the 244-AR Vault. The DOE Office of River Protection and tank cleanup contractor CH2M HILL Hanford Group are stabilizing the facility so it can be closed, while continuing cleanup efforts on Hanford's 177 large radioactive waste tanks.

CH2M HILL Hanford Group, Inc. is ORP's prime contractor with responsibility for retrieving for treatment and disposing of approximately 53 million gallons of radioactive and hazardous waste stored in 177 underground tanks. ORP's other prime contractor, Bechtel National, Inc. is building the Waste Treatment Plant that will immobilize in glass Hanford's high-level tank waste.

It is part of the CH2M HILL family of employee-owned companies that provides engineering, construction, operations, and related technical services to public and private clients in numerous industries. The firm's work is concentrated in the areas of water, energy, environment, transportation, telecommunications, construction, and industrial facilities. CH2M HILL has more than 10,000 employees in 165 offices worldwide.

###

ORP 03-013